

ROBERT RICHARD LAYBOURN

Oral History Transcript

- **OCCUPATION: CONTRACTOR, CHEYENNE, WYOMING**
- **BORN: MARCH 28, 1926-Cedar Rapids, Iowa.**
- **INTERVIEWER: MARK JUNGE**
- **TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED BY SUE CASTANEDA**
- **INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 8, 2010**
- **TOPIC: WORLD WAR II MILITARY HISTORY**
- **PLACE OF INTERVIEW: HOME OF MARGARET AND ROBERT LAYBOURN – 760 CUSTER DR., CHEYENNE, WY.**
- **SOURCE RECORDING FOR TRANSCRIPTION: MP3 RECORDING BY MARK JUNGE**
- **PRODUCED BY THE WYOMING STATE ARCHIVES/WYOMING’S DEPARTMENT OF STATE PARKS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

TRANSCRIBER’S NOTES: I HAVE ADDED SOME REFERENCE FOOTNOTES TO THIS TRANSCRIPT WHERE I THOUGHT APPROPRIATE. IN MOST CASES I HAVE DELETED REDUNDANT ANDS, ERS, UHS, BUTS, FALSE STARTS, CONVERSATION UNIMPORTANT TO THE TOPIC, ETC. AS WELL, I HAVE RETAINED THE INTERVIEWEES MILITARY TERMINOLOGY APPROPRIATE TO THE ERA.

MARK JUNGE: Okay are you ready?

BOB LAYBOURN: No.

MARK JUNGE: This is Mark Junge and I'm in the home of Bob and Margaret Laybourn here at 740 Custer St., Cheyenne, WY. It is 8 May, 2010. I am talking to a guy name "Obstinate Bob." (They both laugh). We are going to see what we can get out of him today. We're both going to talk about Bob and his life and some of his memories--whatever you want to talk about Bob. What is your full name?

BOB LAYBOURN: Robert Richard Laybourn. And my mother would get mad at me. She would say, "Bobby! Robert! Richard! Dickey! You just wait until your dad gets home!" And I would get a hell of a beating too-- whatever I did.

MARK JUNGE: Where and when were you born?

BOB LAYBOURN: Cedar Rapids, Iowa on March 28, 1926. I'm 83.

MARK JUNGE: No. You just turned 84.

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh. I'm 84 now. That's right.

MARK JUNGE: Who were your parents?

BOB LAYBOURN: Hale Harold Laybourn was my dad and my brother's name was Hale.

MARK JUNGE: Laybourn is French?

BOB LAYBOURN: English and French, I guess.

MARK JUNGE: And your mom's name?

BOB LAYBOURN: Reba Sturdivant. She was Dutch. My dad would always say, "She's Dutch. Stubborn."

MARK JUNGE: Do remember their birthdates or when they were born?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh hell no. Do you see all those pictures in the hall? I don't know any of those kids birthdays.

MARK JUNGE: (Laughs). All right. I won't ask you for any dates. How did they get to Cedar Rapids?

BOB LAYBOURN: I don't know. My dad worked for "Oshkosh, b'Gosh."¹ They made overalls, you know? They went belly up during the depression and we came out here...skidded out here on our nose-- because he was out of work when they closed the factory. He became a salesman for Tyrrell Chevrolet and he worked for Montgomery Wards and then he started his own business--Hale's Wholeservice. Roofing, Siding and Insulation. I worked at Woolworth's, so when I came home I didn't want to work at Woolworth's anymore. I went to work for him for 10 years but boy--it was uphill! There wasn't a damn thing I could do to please him. Not at all.

MARK JUNGE: Really?

BOB LAYBOURN: He would say, "I want somebody who can think on their feet."

MARK JUNGE: Why did he come to Wyoming? Why didn't he go to California like a lot of people did ? Was there a job here or something? Did he know anybody?

BOB LAYBOURN: Yes, down in Cope, Colorado there was a cousin or something because we went down there when we had no place else to live and stayed there for a while. We thought they were rich. They had an apple orchard and a roomful of apples--just full of apples. You could eat apples all day long. I mean really, we had never seen so many apples. We thought we hit the jackpot, boy!

MARK JUNGE: What was your mom like? What kind of person was she?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh my mom... she was a great gal. He was an alcoholic and so it was tough for her. You never know... you'd come home and he'd have a bottle. There would be a bottle under the seat and a bottle in the rafters-- he never wanted to be very far from the bottle. It was too bad because he was a hard worker. It's too bad because that's what gets you. They told me you had that trouble. (They both laugh.)

MARK JUNGE: I will just put a little side note in here that this is going to happen all the way through this interview with Bob. Anyway, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

BOB LAYBOURN: I had one brother--Hale Harold Junior and I had five sisters who are all dead. Every one of them. I'm one of the last ones here.

MARK JUNGE: You are the youngest?

BOB LAYBOURN: No. The first two were twin sisters and then my sister Pat, that's three. Then there was Billy Laybourn and then there was Jackie Laybourn. All of them. They're all gone. Hale comes up every now and then from Fort Collins. He's three or four years older than I am. He worked-- he was the CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield in Fargo, North Dakota. When he got to be 65 years old they pushed him out. He'd reach the limit and it killed him! Everybody was jumping through hoops for him and all of a sudden he was home with his wife without anything to do. They would have their yearly meeting in Switzerland. Those guys really knew how to spend money. What the hell did they have to take a yearly meeting of Blue Cross Blue Shield in Switzerland for?

MARK JUNGE: Did you guys get along okay?

BOB LAYBOURN: I guess we had sibling rivalry. He was in the Army over in Europe when I was in the Marines over in Japan. Dad wanted him to take over the business but he didn't want it. He wanted to be a CPA. He didn't want to sit around on roofs and all that stuff.

MARK JUNGE: But you made that decision.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, I had to. I had 10 kids.

MARK JUNGE: So you guys come to Wyoming. You remember what year that was?

BOB LAYBOURN: I was about 4 1/2 years old and I'm 84 so it was 80 years ago.

MARK JUNGE: Wow. Wow. Where did you guys live?

BOB LAYBOURN: The last motel as you are going out West before the railroad hump-- Motel 8 or something. There was a Star Camp. It was an early motel. They tore it down. You had to go to a community bathroom and there was one room with seven of us. We would go up on the tracks there and the train would come by--it was coal driven. We would pick up the coal scraps because we had little wooden stoves in each of these rooms and those guys would see me picking up coal and they would throw coal out of the coal cars. Then when it was gone, we got cow pies and burned cow pies.

MARK JUNGE: Did you really?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh yeah. It was tough! My mother--sometimes she would have some oatmeal is about all she would have. She would fry oatmeal patties, she would get cream on them, get strawberries on them and get honey on them. You would get a burnt oatmeal patty. I can't eat oatmeal today. That poor woman she had it tough but he always had enough money for a bottle. Because that was necessary. It was like putting oil in your car. You have to put oil in your motor. You gotta put "hooch" in your body. But this guy has no trouble with hooch, I'm telling you.

MARK JUNGE: You don't, huh?

BOB LAYBOURN: Boy, I hate it!

MARK JUNGE: Everybody is gone but you and your brother. You were the last sole survivors?

BOB LAYBOURN: Sole survivors.

MARK JUNGE: Let me ask you this--has anybody ever talked to you about your family history before? Did your mother or father ever talk to you about their ancestors?

BOB LAYBOURN: We were never very "buddy buddy" with any other family members. We were the poor end. We had no place for them to stay and we didn't want to buy any food to feed them. (Laughs). It was tough kid! I remember that I had a wagon and when they were giving food rations to people that were really down and out I would go down there and they would put some oranges and stuff in it and then drag it home. Those were tough times. We had fifty cents or a dollar tennis shoes and there would be holes in them so we would slip cardboard in there to cover the hole. The water would come right through the cardboard in the snow. But that's good for you. It tempers you.

MARK JUNGE: I think you're right about that. Where did you go to school?

BOB LAYBOURN: The old Corlett (elementary). Not this new one. The old Corlett was this big red stone holding--a two-story. It was about where the one they just tore down is. Over by Mead Lumber by the new St. Mary's. Then I went over to the old Central.

MARK JUNGE: That's where you park your Volkswagens when you want to sell them.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, we owned the house at 2760... we lived there for 37 years.

MARK JUNGE: You moved from the camp to there?

BOB LAYBOURN: You're talking about my family? Not Margaret and me?

MARK JUNGE: Right.

BOB LAYBOURN: We went to 409 W. 20th St.--there were three little houses there around with the police department is. They tore them all down. They were like 12' x 30' long. Three rooms in line. No plumbing. No electrical. No heat. We lived there with a whole bunch of us.

MARK JUNGE: How did you go to the bathroom?

BOB LAYBOURN: We went out by the alley. For all three houses there was one bathroom. So you would and watch to see if there was anybody in there and then it was your turn. And they had sidewalks and the Crow Creek would come so far up that we could use them for rafts. Hell, there would be a foot of water in our backyard. We would just get on there and take a stick and float the sidewalk. That's the truth! I don't know what they did to stop that so that Crow Creek wouldn't flood that far into town. See, that was only a half a block from the County building. When I had a paper route-- it was free and I think I threw it at every house. The Cheyenne newspaper was a free paper-- free delivery. They would charge people for ads in it but not to take delivery. I had a route that went past the Owl Inn and went north as far as Godfather's Pizza. Jesus, I hated it. Every morning I had to force myself. Some mornings I just ditched the papers. (Laughs). Oh God, those were the days my friend!

MARK JUNGE: I think Maury Brown told me that he sold papers out at the base. Where did you pick up your papers then? Did you go downtown?

BOB LAYBOURN: Yes. You went down there and got them.

MARK JUNGE: Next to the Elk's building (110 E. 17th St.).

BOB LAYBOURN: We used to go down there and fold the papers there because it was warm. But that was a new building--the one that is empty now. I can't think of what the old building was like. Maybe it was just remodeled. They put that black marble on there. It wasn't always that good looking. We would go in the back door and sit down there with our bundle where it was warm and fold them. Then we had to go out--and you know, winters used to be a lot tougher than they are now. Winters are not like they used to be. And cold! Oh my God!

MARK JUNGE: What did you do with the money you made? Did you make much money?

BOB LAYBOURN: If they found out that I got any money I was supposed to give it into the family. So I always managed to say, "I didn't make any money this week." I know what it was. Over on the west end was Dairy Gold. If you were behind Mead Lumber, there is a big brick building-- right now it is antiques. It goes down underneath it. That's where the Dairy Gold trucks went down underneath it to load their milk. A little further up was the Matterhorn bakery. I would go by with my bag of 500 papers in it. They

would let me take any of the rolls I wanted. Then I would go down and get chocolate milk. Boy, I managed it all before I got home. I wasn't going to share it with anybody!

MARK JUNG: Did your brothers and sisters work too?

BOB LAYBOURN: They had to. All of us had to. Hale worked for Cheyenne Newspapers for a long time. That's where he started his CPA stuff. Then he went to the health department and was there for a long time and then he went to Blue Cross Blue Shield. The sisters--one of them worked for Dr. Gramlich as a receptionist. The other one worked for Zale's Jewelry. Do you remember Zale's Jewelry on the alley? You know where Prairie Rose is? (1721 Carey Avenue) You go towards the alley south. The last building there on that side was Zale's Jewelry. Louise worked there for...

MARK JUNG: Give me the names of your sisters.

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh God. Well, the twins... the two girls... One of them was named Louise Marie and the other one was named Marie Louise. Those girls... we had a couch in the living room and I would get down behind the couch when they would get a boy. They would be sitting on the couch with the boy and he had the wrong girl he didn't know it. He didn't know which one he had--Louise Marie or Marie Louise (laughs). And they would do it to him. They weren't identical but they were pretty close to identical. All their lives they brought close alike. One lived in Montana and one lived in Indiana. They managed to keep that thing going. And then they got into graphoanalysis.

MARK JUNG: The analyzation of handwriting.

BOB LAYBOURN: They would come to me and say, "Write something down." I would say "I'm not going to write something down. You'll tell me all the things that are wrong with me." I would never give them any handwriting.

MARK JUNG: Were they psychic? Did they know what the other one was doing all the time?

BOB LAYBOURN: I don't know but they were close right up into the end. They dressed alike and they looked a lot alike.

MARK JUNG: How did you get along with those two?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, because they were the first two-- there were seven of us-- and they would leave them in charge... We would say, "Can we go down to Crow Creek and play?" "No!" So they were in charge and that wasn't good. "Take a bath." "I don't have to take a bath." "The hell you don't!" I wasn't big on baths.

MARK JUNG: So there were the twins--Marie Louise and Louise Marie. Who else?

BOB LAYBOURN: Then there was Patricia. Pat Laybourn. Patricia. She had bulbar polio.² She wasn't in this town--she married a guy at the air base and lived in Iowa. They had her in one of those machines that help you breathe. My mother went out to see her just before she died. We (Margaret and I) were expecting our first child about the time this was going on and we didn't have the money to fly and I

didn't want to leave anyway. I always felt bad about that. Pat was a great gal. Good looker! Hard worker!

MARK JUNG: Did she die of polio then?

BOB LAYBOURN: Bulbar polio--what the hell does it mean? Something about not being able to breathe. She was in an iron lung but she didn't make it. She had two little girls who used to go see every now and then. They write to us. They are from Montana.

MARK JUNG: Were you close to her?

BOB LAYBOURN: Pat was--she wasn't like the two other girls. They would leave and they were in charge. You don't like people who tell you where to go and what you can do. I'm not for that. You know, that's like kids now. Danny comes by here all the time. He was a hell raiser in a sense. He and his buddies would go out and party and he would get a car. He gave you a call at 2 o'clock in the morning and said, "Pops, coming you gotta come over here... (Unintelligible)." I never would believe that he would settle down and be a captain pilot of a big airplane with 160 people behind him. And he's good-looking. The stewardesses... The girls just drive him nuts and he loves that. (Laughs). He loves little kids. He loves our great-grandkids. He says he wishes he had a baby. I said, "Well, you damned dummy. You've got to get married." He says, "I just want the baby and I don't want to stay home and take care of it either."

MARK JUNG: Okay, you got twin sisters and then Pat and then who?

BOB LAYBOURN: Hale was number three and then Pat. I guess I was right after Pat. Then there was my sister Betty. And Jackie.

MARK JUNG: What do you remember about them? What are your memories?

BOB LAYBOURN: All of them--except the two that were bossy--I got along pretty good with.

MARK JUNG: Did you ever get into trouble when you were a kid?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh, I did all kinds of things. One time there was a boy that I went to school with. He had a car. I never even had a bicycle. He had a car and so I started running with him. He would speed through town. So one day, there was a place called Pacific Fruit. It was on 16th Street about where the Green Door is. They had a big dock and they brought food in there. He says, "Let's go steal those." I said, "What are we going to do with them?" He said, "It don't matter." So we pulled up alongside the dock, went out and grabbed a lug of peaches and the police were right there. (Laughs). We are going up on the viaduct and I said, "What are you going to do with them?" Oh yeah... I used to do some stupid things! I never was the ringleader but I would sure as hell follow. That's how I got into the Marine Corps--I was hanging around with the Morrell -- Ralph and Tim Morrell. Ralph gone into the Marine Corps and he was already dead-- over in (unintelligible) island somewhere. Ted was my age and he was going in so I said, "I've got to go in." Really, that's how it started. I never saw him again. You think you go in with somebody-- that doesn't mean anything. You may never see them again. I never saw him again. I don't even know if he made it or not.

MARK JUNG: When did you go in?

BOB LAYBOURN: I can't tell you that. Well, you had to be 17. So, the day I was 17 I was down at the American National Bank. They had a recruitment office and I went down there. I said, "I'm 17 now." They said, "You still have to get your parents to sign." I thought, "Well, that's a dead end." I don't know what we did about it. But you know, all these Marines were about six footers, 250 pounds and could carry a water cooler machine between their legs. I went down there and I weighed 138 pounds. "You want to be a Marine?" This runty little rat! They sent me down to the courthouse in Denver is where you take your physical and they would scare you from the minute that you went in there. First of all, you went down to Denver by yourself and you had to get in line. God, the line went out of the building around... there were a million people. You had to get undressed and sit around naked for hours while they poked you and looked at you. I didn't like any of that. And then they sent me to San Diego alone and I had never been out of Cheyenne. Then you get out there and the first thing that they do... You know what they do that makes you so tough? They have a drill instructor--a DI they call it. "Okay, you bastards! Get out of that truck and stand over here! You dumb son of a bitch!" They called every name and that... I thought what the hell is the matter with this guy? He doesn't even know us! That's the way that they tough and you up--they think. It was the stupidest thing that ever happened. Every other word was some filthy word, you know. I thought, "How the hell was I ever stupid enough to do this?" And you can't get back out, you know. From the minute I got in I knew I'd made a mistake. It was not my bag of tricks at all. I was only in three months and I was overseas. Two months in San Diego and one month in Pendleton. They were so hungry for replacements because they had depleted... Island-hopping was stupid. It cost all those lives and they would always go ashore for those gun placement. Those guys and their pillboxes would mow you down. Why the hell didn't they go down there a mile and come around behind them or something? When we went to Okinawa--who told them we had to buck right up against them or something? Why couldn't they sneak in sideways or something?

MARK JUNG: A great story that you tell--tell me Bob about the fantail on the LST₃ and how that "Jap Zero"₄ saved your life.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well... let's see. We went overseas on the USS Gen. Collins₅ which was a great big troopship. There were six floors. We were probably on the waterline--the last floor down there. The bunks were four tiers high. You just barely had room to slide into the bunk. Just like a shelf. Oh God--the air down there. There was no air-conditioning and we were way below the waterline. I didn't think I would make it past there. One day, for some reason I was able to get above deck where you could see the sky. A lot of times you wouldn't see the sky all day. They apparently thought a Jap sub was there so these Corvettes-- these little...they had ashcans to throw out. I was standing near the rail looking out to the sea envoy and they come zipping in all around us throwing these cans. I thought, "Hell! The U.S. Navy is going to sink us. We don't need a Jap!" That ship was a big ship! When those things went off the whole ship was rattled. Our ship was sluggish because it was a big troopship. They come zipping around and throwing off these ash cans.

MARK JUNG: Yeah, they were explosives. Depth charges.

BOB LAYBOURN: That was about as scary as anything. I thought we were never going to get over there but we finally got to Saipan. They were terribly depleted. I was in the second Marines, second Regiment, third Battalion machine gun crew. In a platoon, there were 60 men. There were only 30 men when they attacked Saipan. The loss of lives was unbelievable! Why! Why! James Michener,⁶ a famous writer-- why didn't we streak through Japan instead of hopping from every island? Hell, that day in Okinawa there were 80,000 casualties in one day! Both Japanese and American. Just think, the next thing after Okinawa we were going to have to strike Japan and drop the bomb. We didn't have to. But anyway, we were on this LST from Saipan and down in hold were these Sherman tanks--probably three of them. That's all the room there was. We were sleeping on top of the deck on those little cots and the ship would roll. Sometimes a cot would go rolling right over the side. We got into a typhoon on the way down in. You know, when I float the Platte and I see those little waves, I think they are terrific. Three-foot tall. These were 30 foot tall and that LST would go up to the top and down the other side. We thought, "Hell, we're never going to make it." The typhoon was terrible! The LST was just like a toy bobbing around. Some way or another we made it and D-Day⁷ morning came. God! There were ships everywhere and there were planes everywhere. It was a big assault.

MARK JUNG: This was on Saipan or Okinawa?

BOB LAYBOURN: Okinawa. We weren't on the assault on Okinawa. We were the replacements on Okinawa after it was secured. There were a few Japs running around the hills but maybe 30 or 40... I don't know how many. Just a few strays. Some of them hung on for years. I remember one day they had us out-- what the hell did they call it? We never saw him officer. We had an officer that day-- a lieutenant. He was a big guy way back in there looking around for Japs, I guess. I don't know. And one of the Japs swooped up out of the bushes. He thought we'd seen him but we hadn't even seen him. Here is a whole platoon and he didn't even have a gun. Everybody started shooting at him and I thought, "My God! There will be nothing but mincemeat left out of that poor guy!" He jumped up and got out into the open and he paid the price, boy. If he had just hidden, we probably would've never seen him. But he spooked when he saw us. You know, the jungle is so thick! They would say, "Watch for legs among us." I said, "You can't see the legs in the jungle. If that's what you are looking for you are going to die because you can't see them in the jungle." For days... I think we were two or three weeks from Saipan to the day that we were going to land-- the attack. We were out there in the water about 8:30 or 9 o'clock in the morning. The sky was filled with both American planes and Japanese planes and bursts of "ack acks" going on all over. And then, the USS Wyoming⁸ came into view not too far from us. They were lobbing 16-inch shells into the island trying to knock out these placements. You can see the shell come right out of the barrel. It was so big. You can watch the shell! I was worried everybody was going to be dead by the time we got there. They had a harbormaster. Somebody was in control of how you assault the island. You don't just come in any damn place. It's like a parade--they tell you where to get in line. Our turn was just coming up. We were starting to get in line to go over and hit the shore and I saw this Jap Zero up there. I was up on the deck. He saw us and they were "ack acking" out of the back and they hit him. They told them, "If you get hit. Make it pay." And they took that plane-- that Zero come down and crashed it... The fantail-- that's where the "ack ack" was. "Blew that fantail off. Blew the "ack ack" off and we never did see those guys again. He had some bomb in there, you know. When they found that

out the harbormaster in charge of the attacks said, "I don't want a crippled ship in line. Get out of line and go back to Saipan." So I never had to go ashore. Just think of that. How can you say it saved your life? In about another hour, I would've been lying in the water shot to pieces because they had concrete bunkers just pouring lead out. There were people lying everywhere!

MARK JUNG: But I thought the island had already been secured.

BOB LAYBOURN: That was Saipan. This was Okinawa. We had left Saipan and went to Okinawa. That's another thing--the Japanese bombers were called "Brown Betty's." I don't know how they got that name but, "Here comes a Brown Betty." They always asked for volunteers and we wouldn't volunteer so they would order you. "It's your turn to go to officer's mess." So I went to officer's mess--and the Cpl.--it was a Mexican kid. He was killed right next to me. Oh my God! I couldn't handle it! Shot right in the heart. Fell down right next to me. I should've been able to handle it. I couldn't do anything for him. I just fell apart. Anyway, he said to me when I went to officer's mess, "They've got beer over there in the cooler. Get me a beer." So I took one beer and put it in my shirt pocket and gave it to the Cpl. They found out about it and busted him to private and put me in the brig for 30 days. (Laughs). I never even got to drink the damn thing! So when I was in there, they put me in the brig with some crazy nut who wanted to go home. He took his pistol and shot his kneecap off thinking they would send him home. So I was in the brig with a nut like that. There were just two of us in there at the time. That night, the Japanese last attempt--they sent a Brown Betty bomber over all the way from Saipan. That's a long way from Japan to Saipan. Here we were in the brig and everybody was taking for cover. I said, "Can we get out of here?" "Hell no! You're not getting out of there! You're in the brig!" It was just a little enclosure you know. I remember watching the sky that night and the Brown Betty bomber didn't drop anything on us. I had a lot of experiences! We used to cut sugarcane all day and it was 105° out there in the sun. They gave a guy--MP... SP, a shore patrol--a machine gun and he stood over you and you had this machete and you had to cut sugarcane out in the field. That was your... if you stopped... he would wave the gun at you. I don't think he would shoot you but...oh, it was horrible. Oh God.

MARK JUNG: Did you actually get into action where you had to shoot?

BOB LAYBOURN: Very little because you see on Saipan across the Island we were looking for strays--that one stray was the only one I ever saw. That standing up Jap. When we went to Okinawa, it was just 15 minutes and I would've been in it. That Jap Zero--I saw them shooting at us and it started smoking. You know what some of the guys were doing? They went up on the fantail of what was left because they wanted a piece of the aluminum off the Jap Zero for a souvenir. I didn't care for a piece of aluminum! I remember one time we were going across "Security Island" (?) and there was a dead Jap. Do you what a K ration is? C ration is a can. Canned stuff. K ration is like a crackerjack. It had two cigarettes and a little small flat can with like eggs or something in it. And then it had like two lemon drops. There was nothing. There was nothing in that sucker. That's what you got. It was lunchtime. And they had these P 38's. They must have been Army because I don't think the Navy had them. They must've been Marine planes. They were following us as we were going through this island. "Securing it" is the words they used. These P 38's were right over our heads spinning lead. I mean, you could see it hitting the ground not very far ahead of you. I mean, how the hell they could control that plane? It must fire whatever way

the plane is pointed because they couldn't turn the gun. God--just right over our heads! So anyway, there was a dead Jap there and it was lunchtime. This guy sat right on his chest and opened up his K ration to show how tough he was, you know. He out got his knife and cut the gold teeth out of him. "God!" I said, "I can't do that!" He said, "Well, where you can get the gold teeth out of a Jap?" I said, "I may never have one! I may never have one if I have to go find a dead Jap and cut his teeth out!" Oh God! But some of them were gung ho. They couldn't help it. I never felt tough. I never wanted to be there. I knew I'd made a mistake when I signed up! All I wanted to do was get home alive!

(They both laugh).

MARK JUNG: How many guys survived out of your unit?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, once the replacements came and we never went ashore--we never lost anybody. Then we came back to Saipan and we loaded up again and when the war was over we went to be the occupation troops. We landed at Sasebo,. It was just kind of a beach. There was no town there. It was like suburban Cheyenne. We went to this beach and they opened up the doors and you jumped into the waters. It was maybe four, five or so feet deep. You went ashore and they would commandeer Japanese railroad trains. Ordered to be there at that time to pick us up. We loaded the trains and went to a big barracks that had been the Japanese military barracks. Wooden. No heat. No plumbing. Oh, it was something else! When we got to the railroad yards... we never had any fruit or anything like that. Eggs and beans and stuff like that (disgusted). Here was a Japanese railroad car-- like a coal car full of mikans. Mikans are like tangerines. Just full of mikans. And we saw those suckers and everybody opened their shirts and just filled them with 30 or 40 of them. When we left that train, the floor was carpeted with peels. That was the first fruit we had no long time, boy!

MARK JUNG: Was the jungle hot?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh yeah! In Saipan lots of times we never even wore a shirt. You just turned wet with sweat. Then you had to take a machete and cut sugarcane in that sun because you stole beer out of the officer's mess. That was another thing--they issued each officer a quart of whiskey a month. They issued it to them. We never got any of that. We didn't have any of those things. This Lieut. offered his up for sale to our platoon. It was 50 bucks he wanted for it. The word kind of trickled down the line. I thought, "Well, I think I'll buy it." I bought it and drank pretty much most of it by myself. I started calling that Lieut. every dirty word I've ever heard. I didn't know I was doing that. The next day, they said, "Boy, you're lucky you are still here. If you have known how you acted..." Another thing was, they dug a hole in the ground and they got of metal bucket and they got some raisins and you put the raisins in the bucket in the ground to ferment to make this juice. They didn't know what they were doing. I never did take any of it. The guys that did take it--they went blind because it was a metal bucket. You had to make it in plastic or something else. You can't ferment in metal. Their sight came back but they went a long time...they couldn't see. Oh, there were so many things that happened! One time-- you know what a Lister bag is don't you? A Lister bag is a canvas bag hanging on a tripod. It's full of water and has a spigot. The only water you were supposed to drink was out of the Lister bag because it was treated. It tasted like the worst thing you ever had. It was out in the hot sun and full of chemicals. There was a little

stream that went down alongside of us so one day when we had a little time we went up to the top of that stream because there was a water tank up there. That's where our supply of water was. It wasn't a big tank--maybe 50 feet across or something like that. It looked big to me. It was open-topped. We decided we were going to look into the top of it. The water they were making us drink--there was a dead Jap in there floating around. He'd gotten up in there to get a drink and fell in. I guess... because he was trying to get some water so here was the water we were told we had to drink was coming out of that tank. Then a little further up that same ravine there was a Japanese prison camp that had been a banana plantation. There were banana trees all around it. There were some pretty stocky Japs in that stockade behind the wire fence. Some of our guys were too smart-alecky. They went up to that fence and taunted them. One guy—didn't like it. He would just running at that fence and smashing himself into that fence. He wanted to get at them. I said, "Why do you guys do that? Why can't you guys just see that he is a prisoner and leave him alone?" No, they weren't satisfied with that. So, one time they sent us on a work permit on the other side of the island. The blacks--they were in the Marine Corps and were not allowed to be in the same outfit that we were in. They were on work crews on the other side of the island. Somebody had them load ammunition or something. So we had to go over there one time to do a job. "Hey boy. Come over here and kiss my shoes." The southern guys--it's inbred in them. I never--"Why do you do that?" These guys would lunge at them. We were in a 6 x 6 truck-- these big trucks with six wheels with benches on each side. They would leap at the truck trying to get a hold of whoever was taunting them. "You guys are crazy! When you get out of taunting them?" "Well, in the South -- a n----r is a n----r and you treat them like one!" Now of course, the blacks are large proportion of the Army and the Navy and the Marine Corps. 50%. Mexicans too. Like this kid that was killed next to me--I can't remember his name but he had enough of an Oriental look--some Mexicans do. He put on a Japanese uniform and a helmet. He had a Japanese hand grenade and at night we would be in this tent while waiting for our turn to go off. He would come in and go, "Bonsai!" It's a damn wonder we didn't kill him! There were so many things--you cannot believe the things they did!

You know what a BAR is? There's a carbine. We had carbines, we had Colt pistols, we had light machine guns which is air-cooled. All this stuff was World War II. They were old firearms!

MARK JUNG: You mean World War I?

BOB LAYBOURN: World War I firearms! World War I stamped right on them--1916 or something. And the paint was gone off. They were worn out and they were making us use those things. I can't believe it!

MARK JUNG: A BAR is a Browning automatic rifle.

BOB LAYBOURN: Right. It was a heavy thing. A big old thing. It was a big old thing with a strap around your neck. You carried it in front of you and you just sprayed it. I'm glad I never had to carry one of them. One time, we had a bet. We were on a march across the island and we took the water cooler with us. Somebody said, "I'll bet you can't carry it back into camp." I said, "I'll bet I can." So I bet 50 bucks--that was more than a month's pay for me. I carried it about halfway--had a hole in my shoulder and I was dead. I said, "Give me my 50 bucks!" That was the last bet I ever made. All that heavy-- that water that has to be in there. You can't bring the water separately.

Mark Laybourn: Oh, this was to cool the gun off.

BOB LAYBOURN: To cool the gun off.

MARK JUNGE: It wasn't drinkable? It wasn't potable?

BOB LAYBOURN: No, it was coolable.

MARK JUNGE: You were in the machine gun crew, right?

BOB LAYBOURN: Yes. So you had the gunner--he was the more experienced man. The assistant gunner and then there were five ammo carriers who each had two metal boxes and trotted along behind because boy, it went fast! You could pour a box of ammo through there in a hurry!

MARK JUNGE: Were you an ammo carrier?

BOB LAYBOURN: I was the lowest--do you know what a grunt is? I was a grunt. The lowest of the low. Sometimes I was a PFC and sometimes I was a private. (They both laugh). One time, they sent me down--we called it the slop house where they made lunch and I had to peel the potatoes. The master sergeant--I don't know why he wanted me to report to his tent. He said, "The gunnery Sgt.-- the master sergeant said you were on the line. He's going to give you hell." So I had put the paring knife in my pocket and I walked in there. I had my hands in my pocket and he said, "When you're in front of me, you stand at attention!" I pulled my head out of my pocket and cut my finger and fainted right there on the floor. I fainted because I was bleeding like crazy!

These guys that had been there long time--they were tough. On the bulletin board, they'd bust the gunnery Sgt. or master sergeant for making somebody do a sexual act on him. The next day it would say, "Gunnery Sgt. or master sergeant so-and-so reduced to rank of private"... because all these years he been making somebody perform acts on him. Oh! They had been over there too long! I was only in there a total of 2 1/2 years. I was three months in San Diego, one month in Pendleton and all the rest that time I was overseas.

MARK JUNGE: On Saipan in Okinawa?

BOB LAYBOURN: And we went to the occupation of Japan.

MARK JUNGE: How did you survive?

BOB LAYBOURN: Just think of these guys now with these car bombs that are blowing up... these car bombs? They blow Humvees up. They blow anything up. We never carried a weapon in Japan. We just had a shirt and pants on because it was hot all the time. Japan was pretty hot for some reason. The Japanese surrendered. What was his name Hirohito?¹⁰ When that bomb came--that was it. They gave it up. Nobody ever attacked us. Nobody ever did anything. It was like a vacation for me in Japan. It wasn't like being in Saipan are going to Okinawa. It was over.

MARK JUNGE: How long were you in Japan?

BOB LAYBOURN: A year.

MARK JUNGE: So you were on guard duty or what did you do?

BOB LAYBOURN: I think it was just the presence--they wanted the presence of the military there. You know, MacArthur¹¹ was in Tokyo running the show. Oh God, that guy! "I will return!" Remember when he marched back up the shore? He was something else! The Marine Corps was a small military outfit compared to the Army or the Navy. I don't know how many people there were but maybe a fourth--it was a small organization. That's why we got aboard the ship they would say "swab jockeys"...they had the halls have the halls over there and they would

MARK JUNGE: The Navy did?

BOB LAYBOURN: The Navy did, yes.

MARK JUNGE: Really? You guys had to take the brunt of the fighting though.

BOB LAYBOURN: They still do. Those young kids over there now are getting blown up. If they had a car bombs, I probably wouldn't be here. We didn't have nothing. When we got there, it was over. For instance, the day we landed at Sasebo we went, "Oh, that's not true. We landed outside of Nagasaki. And then we went to Sasebo and Nagasaki was where the bombs hit so they had us up on the hillside ...it was a big depression. A huge depression. They wanted to have an aerial bomb and everything was gone as far as you can see both ways--three or four miles this way and three or four miles that way. There was nothing left. That's what I remember now. So when they got us to shore and they said is on the top of the hill with all of our gear. Across the street was the home guard. We were dirty and disheveled, dungarees hadn't been laundered for weeks. On the other side were guys with their shoes shined, their machine guns and everything surrendering to us. They didn't give us any trouble. They looked good! And our guys--you know what our guys did? In my platoon there were 60 guys. Forty of them just dropped their packs and their guns and went looking for a geisha house. They threw every one of them in the brig when they came back. I didn't go.

MARK JUNGE: Why not?

BOB LAYBOURN: I was a yellow belly. I was always the yellow belly. I never was the tough guy. I was 138-pound weakling, you know. Remember the ads in the back of those cartoons that would say Atlas--is going to make you strong when you go on the beach? Why I was that little guy! (Laughs). Really I never had... somebody would suggest something and I would do it. That was another thing. There was a big bomb crater behind our camp. It must've been a 500-pound bomb. A big bomb crater! I mean it was big! And we found a charcoal burning car and we get some charcoal. We lit it up. We would go down that crater and up the other side. They found out we had found this car and we had a good time. They took it away from us. Oh, for three or four hours we had a ball! The charcoal made some kind of gas. The car didn't run on gas. You lit up the charcoal-- I don't know how it worked. Here's another thing I forgot to tell you... why were we out loose? There was only two or three of us in this train--their engines weren't anything like Big Boy¹²--they were just little things. We stopped the train. We got the engineer

out and we started going down the track. We didn't know where we're going and then another train started coming toward us. I never would've done any of those things except that I was with a lot of guys who had a lot of verb. I was a follower. I didn't actually drive it but they did.

MARK JUNGE: How did you stop the train?

BOB LAYBOURN: I don't know. I wasn't the driver. I was a participant. Here's another thing. We come to a poor little farm village. Why they were sending us out on those little forays, I don't know. We were tired of K rations. We come to a farm house and there was a chicken. They needed that chicken that laid eggs but we cooked that sucker and ate it. They couldn't do anything. The poor farmers just watched us. Those are those mean American Marines who took our chicken and ate it. We didn't do anything else to them but that was bad enough. You are 17-years-old--you don't realize. What difference does it make?

MARK JUNGE: You came into Nagasaki right after they dropped the bomb?

BOB LAYBOURN: No it took a while. It must've been at least two or three weeks because after they dropped the bomb that they had the signing in the harbor of the surrender. Then we had to travel from Saipan. The actual date I can't tell you. After they surrendered, then they had to get FDR. FDR went over there and Churchill went over there. That didn't happen overnight. Then they sent us in.

MARK JUNGE: Did you see the results? Did you see the people of Nagasaki after the bombing?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh yes. When we got the Nagasaki--even if it was through three weeks--there wasn't a blade of grass, there wasn't a tree. There were no houses. There was just nothing. And these poor guys--they had no place to go to the bathroom. They had no place to get medical attention. They had no place to get a drink of water. Their clothes were in shreds -- still, even after two or three weeks. Their flesh sometimes was burned. It was awful looking! So what do these fellows want to do? Throw down their packs and guns and look for a geisha house. Some guys were--I was retarded! I was retarded. It never occurred to me. I just wanted to get by. I wanted to go to bed at nine. I wanted to have my food. I wanted to go home.

MARK JUNGE: Did you eat well over there?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh no. There was no good stuff--just enough to get by. You waited in line and they had a big pan of eggs--dried powdered eggs and they slopped that out on the tray. And sometimes we had what they call "shit on the shingle." And then after you are on Saipan for a while, building up and getting ready to go to the next place --you scrounge lumber and you build a pyramid tent. I don't remember how many sides a pyramid tent has-- whether it has eight sides or what ...and roll-up sides. You build the kind of wood floor if you can scrounge some lumber, a hammer and nails. We were building this floor in one of our tents and there was only one hammer and they were fighting over it. Bill Franklin. We called him "Canuck." He wouldn't fight for Canada. He left Canada and came down and joined the Marines. He wouldn't fight for Canada because he didn't like the Prime Minister. Canuck was my best buddy--oh God! The guy grabs the hammer away from Canuck. It was 105° and they started punching each other and blood was flying everywhere. I said, "What the hell! It's just a hammer. Let's

quit!" Boy, they stayed at it until they fell over. They were just going to kill each other over the possession of a hammer. It was terrible. I know I couldn't stand watching them.

MARK JUNG: Your friend--was he your friend after the war too?

BOB LAYBOURN: Yes, he can by one time. He went back to Canada--Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He came by here one time. He was a lead miner. He went into something and made big money. Lead mining maybe paid good money but it wasn't good for your health.

MARK JUNG: When you were over Nagasaki, there was a lot of radiation there wasn't there?

BOB LAYBOURN: We were worried about that. We said, "Why are they sending us in..." Maybe it was two weeks.. You don't realize it but kids just stumble-bum... That's a good word "stumble bum"... We were just give just doing what we were told but I worried about that. I had 10 kids so it didn't affect me too bad. We heard it would make you sterile--that's what we heard. I wouldn't say worked on me (laughs). On this hillside that we were on looking down into that area blast... there was one building that was all concrete and a few pieces still sticking up. That's all. Up on the other side of the hill, there were like school buses--Army buses with sightseeing officers. They would come out, look around and get back in the bus and go home. It was a showpiece. "You see what we can do with the bomb? We can incinerate all of these people and their buildings. Their trees, their grass, everything." They were trying to sell it to the rest of the military. "This is what we can do." We couldn't believe it--sightseeing! We were there because they told us to.

MARK JUNG: There is a lot of argument about this. Do you think the dropping the bomb saved lives?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, that's what Margaret says. "Don't tell people that the bomb saved your life." I say this--it was luck there on Okinawa. The home guard would've fought to the death at home. I guess everyplace they were... there weren't very many prisoners. They killed them all--so they would have fought to the death. It would have been a tough assault on the Japanese homeland. Of course, it wasn't because of the bomb. It saved American lives but cost a lot of Japanese lives. The Japanese--when they came to Pearl Harbor--they killed a lot of our people. They took us to Wake Island on the way over-- we went ashore and there was nothing but stubble. Not a coconut tree...nothing left on that island. They had blown up everything. There were no buildings. There were no people. I don't know why the hell they stopped us there and let us get off. We didn't get to do a lot of things--only what they said we could do.

MARK JUNG: Did you lose any friends over there?

BOB LAYBOURN: No, because we never actually made the assault. And on the island, there were just a few stragglers. They found that 30 years later. They hung on for 30 years back in there. Well, one time we went up on the top of the hill and there was an old medical center. The cots were still there with the bodies still on them. They were like... what do we call that?

MARK JUNG: Rigor mortis.

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh, way past rigor mortis.

MARK JUNGE: Desiccated or mummified.

BOB LAYBOURN: Mummified. Here's this guy laying on the cot where they carried him in and they didn't take care of them. And then we came... it was a medical collection center for the Japanese from the fighting and the assault on the island. They were just still lying there dead on the cots. And then next to them, were a lot of caves. The Japanese were big on caves. I never went near one. I'm telling you, I was the most yellow belly you ever saw! We had a little French guy with us. He would go into those caves and he would bring out cans of crabmeat. Some of the cans were rusted out and blown up. He would open them up and say, "Try some crab." There were so many things that happened all the time but you knew all the time that they were building up and replenishing the troops in the second Marine division, second Regiments for whatever they had in mind. Margaret says, "Don't tell people that either the (unintelligible) saved your life or the atomic bomb saved your life." I said, "I think both of them did."

MARK JUNGE: What is Margaret's problem with that?

BOB LAYBOURN: She doesn't like me saying it. She says it sounds like I am callous. I said, "Callous! It saved my skin! That's what I care about!" I told my boys when they were trying to get everybody for these other wars coming along, "Hide under the bed, go to Canada, do anything but don't be cannon fodder for the military." That's all we were! We had a number on rifle. A number on our dog tag. Hell, I didn't feel like no damn number!

MARK JUNGE: When you look back at that. Then, you do have to consider yourself pretty lucky.

BOB LAYBOURN: Damn lucky! Then there were guys on the island in Saipan that got... what the hell did they call it? Well, ruptures on their skin. So anyway, this guy started having and he went to the medic and they had an APC pill. You got an ₁₃ for everything (laughs). Whatever you had you got the same pill. But anyway, they would leave these guys out of the sun in their lesions would be erupting and bleeding. They poured sulpha on it and they would leave them in the sun. I thought, "Thank God I didn't get that!" You would see these poor guys with their legs all white with sulfa. I guess it helped them some.

MARK JUNGE: Did you ever get injured at all?

BOB LAYBOURN: I cut my finger on a paring knife (laughs). (To Margaret) He's making fun of me Margaret. Get him out of here!

MARK JUNGE: We're having fun!

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, we were just lucky because there were a lot of them and never came back. Never came back.

MARK JUNGE: Did you lose some friends then?

Laybourn: Not in our immediate tent. There were eight guys in our machine gun squad. No. Because we were never in a position where they were pouring lead at us.

MARK JUNG: So you never got shot at?

BOB LAYBOURN: well, they were shooting at us in that water but we were lucky that...even though the fantail was blown off and the steering was (unintelligible) the boat was floatable. The LST was still above water.

MARK JUNG: But it was going around in circles, wasn't it?

BOB LAYBOURN: No, it wasn't going around in circles but if they wanted you to go to one particular point but the rudder wasn't working right. It was good enough that we can go back to Saipan even though that was a long way.

MARK JUNG: Can you go back to that time when you are in that boat and remember how you felt? Were you scared?

Laybourn: Was there a time I wasn't scared? Do you think there was a time that I was a big tough Marine? It never happened! It never happened. I remember when we docked there outside of Nagasaki and they opened up the doors of the thing and you had to jump down in the water to go get on this train... some of the guys... I don't know how high the side of an LST above water but probably 50 feet. I don't know. It's a long ways down there. They were jumping off in the water.

MARK JUNG: Who was jumping off the side?

BOB LAYBOURN: These young Marines. A lot of them--see, I would never, never jump off a high springboard. It wasn't my thing. I would jump in the water but I wouldn't jump off a 50-foot high springboard so they picked me up and threw me off. I thought I was dead! I had the water with my butt. It was like a rock and then I had to get over to the shore. And here are the other things they would do-- "Let's get Laybourn. He's kind of a yellow belly. Let's throw him in the water." Oh, when I went over that side I thought it was over.

MARK JUNG: Was the water over your head or not?

BOB LAYBOURN: It must've been a mile over my head! (Laughs).

MARK JUNG: You had all of your equipment on or not?

BOB LAYBOURN: I can't remember if I had my backpack on at the time or not. You never knew what those guys were going to do. There were some real characters?

I'll tell you about another thing that happened in Japan. I don't think it was Canuck--I don't know who got me into this deal. The guys were selling their cigarettes. Everybody got issued one carton of cigarettes a month. I didn't smoke. I didn't give a damn. I never smoked any of them. Raleigh's were the bottom of the barrel so you could sell them for three or \$4000--yen. Three or ¥4000 was eight dollars.

MARK JUNG: That's a lot of money.

BOB LAYBOURN: Eight dollars?

MARK JUNGE: Yes, eight dollars was a lot of money in those days.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well anyway, we thought were going to get rich. So someway, we still have two cartons of powdered eggs. There were four cans in a carton. We didn't even know who we were going to sell them to. So here comes an MP Jeep. If they catch us, they would put us in the brig. We went down and laid in the mud in a rice paddy until they went by. We were covered with mud. We did sell them and I think I had at one time ¥80,000. That was worth maybe 30 or \$40. I wouldn't be the inciter but I would certainly go along.

MARK JUNGE: Did you ever have poker games we lost money like that?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh no. I never played with money that way. But those guys did gamble. They would get stuff from home--if they get a box of cookies or cake or something they would peddle it. "How much you give for this cake?"

MARK JUNGE: Did they take a certain percentage of your paycheck and send it home?

BOB LAYBOURN: I think there was some kind of arrangement like bad but hell; it was only \$48 a month so they couldn't send very much home. I never ever had \$20 at a time. Money was... what good was it? What were we going to do with it?

MARK JUNGE: Well Bob, you didn't drink, you didn't go to the geisha houses. You didn't gamble. What did you do for fun?

BOB LAYBOURN: We did lots of things. R&R. We used to hear about R&R. We never got any R&R.

MARK JUNGE: Rest and relaxation.

BOB LAYBOURN: Some of these guys--the Army would give them two weeks off to go to some island for R&R. No, we never had any R&R. I don't know-- I met a family. He was the interpreter for our Battalion. He was a little guy who must've weighed less than 100 pounds. A nice little guy and he could speak English pretty good. He was friendly and was glad to have a job as an interpreter. He took me to his house and I took him like a tube of toothpaste or a bar of soap. What else did I have? I asked him. I says, "I would like to have a photo album." He went right to his room and tore all of his pictures out of his photo album and gave it to me and I still have it. So then I wanted to bring a kimono home to my mother. He went to his wife's closet. They had very little stuff. They were poor. I said, "No, no, no." He said, "She wants to give it to you. She likes you." So later on, when we had our family and we were over there 2716 Warren Ave., they wrote a letter and said they would like to send either a son or daughter to come and live with us for a year to pick up America's way of life. We had 10 kids. I said, "Hell, no." I didn't need another one around there. But I wish I had done it now partially because of the experience of it--a Japanese kid. I don't know whether was a boy or girl.

MARK JUNGE: Did you speak any Japanese?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh, I learned a few things. When I recite this stuff... tomago was supposed to be an egg. So we would go knock on the door and say, "tomago." We knew the name of a flag. "Anatatowatashi" -- you and me. "Arigatō" - thank you. A few sparse words but nothing that made much sense so they would always laugh. When Margaret and I went over there to Japan--flew over and went to Nagasaki--- the thing was was that nobody was ever supposed to be able to live at Ground Zero. It was a peace park -- both Nagasaki and Hiroshima. There are 10,000 school kids and visitors there every day at the very center of that bomb. So the radiation must've dispelled pretty quick.

MARK JUNGE: When you went back after the war--you and Margaret...

BOB LAYBOURN: It was 20 years ago, I don't know....

MARK JUNGE: Were you surprised to see what you saw?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh yeah, because we stayed in the hotel and there was a traffic light down at the corner. Everything in that area was new construction after the war in Nagasaki. There were new buildings and the taxi would come. He would come to a stop light and he would turn off his car. He wouldn't idle his engine. Come to the next stoplight and then he would turn it off. Gas was expensive!

MARK JUNGE: You probably didn't even recognize the place.

BOB LAYBOURN: oh, it wasn't anything like we saw! Every building was new.

MARK JUNGE: I would gather that after the explosion all of the color was gone. You said there wasn't even a blade of grass. It must've been just like gray and white.

BOB LAYBOURN: It was just desolation. That's all it was. You couldn't see the street markings. But it wasn't aground last. I don't know how high in the air... but they purposely... they wanted it to spread more of in this valley, see. And it did. They were learning too!

MARK JUNGE: Did you go over to Hiroshima?

BOB LAYBOURN: No. I never did. See, Honshu and Kyushu... We were on Honshu. Then there is water and then there is Kyushu. They always said there was a tunnel under the sea and that a train or car... It's like the one they have now in Europe now between Britain and France. We went around a lot. We went to places where there wouldn't be any more Americanos. We were going to neighborhoods where was all Japanese. There were no tourists. And then we would go to a café and it was in somebody's home and they serve you right in their home. Where do they make Japanese pottery? It's famous. Famous Japanese pottery. So we got to that town. We got there and the whole lot was gone. Chewed away. It was where they get their clay. They made so many different potteries and they ate a mountain of it. Not too far from there was a natural hot water--just like Saratoga. A hot springs mud bath. We didn't know what we were going to do so we decided to go over to the mud bath. You couldn't wear any clothes. You went in and took up all of your clothes and here all of these Japanese people in the mud bath. You had to get naked in there and get mud on you. It was some experience about how you... (Laughs). We didn't really want to do it but everybody else was in there.

MARK JUNGE: So did it make any difference?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh, it was hard to do.

MARK JUNGE: Were you embarrassed, you mean?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, coming out of where you take your clothes off to where you got in to the mud...say it was a block that you had to walk out in the open. It was not normal! But we tried a lot of different things. Their trains were going 150 miles an hour. We got on the train to go somewhere and the whole train is full of Japanese people. We were probably one of the rare Americans to get on there.

MARK JUNGE: Now this is when you went back?

BOB LAYBOURN: Yeah, when we went back. This thing is going hundred and 50 miles an hour and it's smooth as silk. You look out the window and see these poor guys-- they had a handful of rice and they were eating them one at a time. We come to where you can see the famous volcano... what's the name of it? Fuji! There was smoke coming out of it as the train was going by and all of the Japanese got up from their seats and came over to us, "Come, come, come see." It was awfully cloudy and you can't see but they came and begged us to come and see it. They wanted to show us Fuji. We had so many experiences you can even think of them all.

MARK JUNGE: When you went to Japan the first time as a Marine what was your impression of the people?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well of course, they expected us to shoot and rape and kill. That's what a lot of the Japanese soldiers did. Of course, there was some of that but I don't know. They were just friendly. Why? They wanted to get along. If you had toothpaste or candy bar or something...

MARK JUNGE: Now you've seen World War II up close. You have seen Korea but you weren't in the service then.

BOB LAYBOURN: No.

MARK JUNGE: But you knew about it. And Vietnam and Iraq. How do you look back at that period of your life?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well you see, that's where the politicians were smart. I think the radar told them that the Japanese Navy was coming toward Hawaii. They picked up and they decided not to do anything about it. That's what I hear. I don't know what really happened. And they let it happen! All those battleships sunk right there in the harbor so that we weren't the aggressors anymore. We were the...

MARK JUNGE: The defenders.

BOB LAYBOURN: The defenders. How this crazy president we had decided to go over there and stop them from making the bomb and started all these wars. I don't know...

MARK JUNGE: Did you like Roosevelt?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh yeah! He was my hero! He was a crippled guy, number one. He had his problems as every one of them do, I don't know. I was so young... I never thought about stuff like that.

MARK JUNG: Did you have a girlfriend at the time?

BOB LAYBOURN: Are you trying to make trouble around here? (They both laugh).

MARK JUNG: Okay. Let me rephrase that. You weren't married to Margaret at the time, were you?

BOB LAYBOURN: No. I came home from the Marine Corps and I went to buy some flowers from her at her little flower shop--the Margaret Reid flower shop downtown on Carey Avenue for another girl. I don't know how I met *her* ... I'm lucky I... I would've killed her easy! She was a terror, boy! We (Margaret) hit it off. I'll say that. I decided to make a big show for her. She had a walk-in flower box with glass doors. I opened the door and shoved her in it and shut the door. There's no handle on the inside. I walked out. She couldn't get out. That was our first meeting! She beat on the wall so somebody in the next building came and let her out.

MARK JUNG: So the next time you saw her what happened?

BOB LAYBOURN: I don't know. I can't sort that out.

MARK JUNG: I'm going to ask her when I interview her.

BOB LAYBOURN: Good, because I would lie anyway (laughs). Anyway, that was our first meeting. She was an "catlicker." That's a Catholic. After we got going, we would go out on a date on Saturday night and she would have to go to confession first. I'd be sitting outside waiting and thinking, "Oh God, what is she telling them?" Then finally I became one. It was a strange thing for me.

MARK JUNG: What were you? Were you raised to be?

BOB LAYBOURN: I remember that Presbyterian Church on Carey Avenue that's only about a block from St. Mary's. I remember going to religious school. We weren't very religious, I'll tell you that. Anyway, this wonderful girl--my life changed the minute I met her. Joy entered my life! She's a wonderful girl! I am the luckiest guy in the world! I really am. I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't even be alive.

MARK JUNG: Really?

BOB LAYBOURN: No. She's great. The greatest.

MARK JUNG: What has she done for your life?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, she has brought joy into my life. She's 100,000% (unintelligible)... she gets you up in the morning, gets you to work, feeds and takes care of you. She does 1000% for you. You can't beat that! She literally gave up her life for my life because she had a flower shop-- she had a business and she had money. I had no money, I had no business and I had no car.

MARK JUNG: Yeah, what did she see in you anyway?

BOB LAYBOURN: That's what I wondered! (Laughs). I'm just lucky that she decided, "I'm going to save that kid."

MARK JUNGE: You know what, Bob. I want to talk to you little bit about your life with Margaret, raising your kids and your job. I think what you are doing now is phenomenal. You are 84 and you are still working.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, Corey is doing all the work. You know what they call a gopher? I'm the gopher. I held them a little bit but he's really doing 90% of the work.

MARK JUNGE: At first, you didn't even really want him as a worker. That's what Margaret tells me.

BOB LAYBOURN: She hired him. He came to our house when they moved out of that house on Warren. We were renting it and he came over from Rawlins and he had a DUI. He came over here trying to get away from them. He rented the upstairs apartment there. He said he had worked for a landscape company planting trees and stuff. He said that shut down because it was October. She said, "My husband will give you a job." She told me, "I hired someone today." I said, "What?" And he was raw! He's not raw anymore. He's amazing! If I am doing something he'll say, "Can't you do that little bit better?" I love that! He thinks of a lot of things I wouldn't think of.

MARK JUNGE: But you taught him a lot too.

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh yeah. He wants to build a garage now. I told him I'm not getting up on the damn garage. I'll help you talk about it.

MARK JUNGE: Who was your partner before him?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh I don't know. I had a lot of guys. When I first started, I worked for my dad for 10 years when I came home. He wasn't very thrilled with me. He wanted to do roofing and siding and installation which I could do but I wanted to build. He didn't want to be in construction. He wanted to be a specialist. So I talked him into it and we built a couple of houses which are behind Elite Cleaners--three of them. We got land for \$600 apiece. We built that house at 691 E. Powell --(off of Yellowstone Road). We got the 5 acres there--I didn't have any money. We had her money. We bought the 5 acres and it sat for 30 or 40 years because we were busy at 2716 Warren Ave. raising these kids. Then we went out there and built this house for speculation. The interest rates for the highest—they were 16 ½%. I people coming out to see the house who really wanted it but then they would go down to the bank and find out the interest rate was 16 ½% on \$100,000. They would have to pay \$250,000 interest over 30 years. They had given me earnest money and they said, "Just keep the earnest money. We want out." So we said, "Hell, we'll move into it." We didn't have that in mind at all. My son John, who has Pole Mountain Electric, lived about three blocks east in Murray Hill Estates—Four Mile Estates. He paid like \$55,000 for what we paid, I think, \$750. It changes so rapidly. When we sold that house and moved to this house, that house sold in three days for \$285,000. Well, that just made a down payment...I never got any of it. I gave it all to my daughter because she bought this house and she financed the remodeling of it. They

decided they were going to save us. They were going to get us a retirement house that was going to last forever.

MARK JUNGE: And you don't appreciate that?

Laybourn: Well, we love it now. But then we thought, "You do anything you want but I'm not going to move in to the damn thing. I'm going to live in the house I built."

MARK JUNGE: What happened when you said you wanted to build but your dad didn't want to build? What happened after that?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, I quit. He was storming at me one day so I quit. I went down to the lumber yard and said, "I'm going to strike out and ..." The lumber yard always had people coming in. You know what I got? Storm doors, storm windows. I didn't get anything good for a long time.

MARK JUNGE: You mean installing doors?

BOB LAYBOURN: Installing doors. That's nothing. You can't make any money. Finally, I started taking on remodeling. I would go anywhere I could go. I was working alone. I hired an old carpenter but he didn't like working for a kid. He was about 55 or so and I was about 27 or 28. He'd been at the trade for years and years and years and he wasn't very smart or he would have still been working for somebody. His name was Harold Snook. Snook didn't like me at all. The first time I had him, I was over on Central. It was one of those steep roofs – a really steep roof. You put toe boards every six feet where you put your feet and then you could go up higher. Well, I was half way done with it by myself and he come along and I put him up on this toe board and the nail didn't...he was a half hour on the job and hanging on the edge of the roof. He said, "Hey Bob, come over here." From that time on, I was never his favorite but he worked for me for a long time.

MARK JUNGE: How many years have you been doing construction work?

BOB LAYBOURN: Sixty-three years. The day I came home—I had to go to work for my dad practically the day I came home because I didn't have any money.

MARK JUNGE: That would have been in 1946?

BOB LAYBOURN: No, I went in 1944 and came out July 26, 1946. I call that my birthday – the day I got home out of the Marine Corp.

MARK JUNGE: And you didn't want to re-enlist?

BOB LAYBOURN: You're kidding me? I don't know why anybody wants to be in the military. These guys--the national guardsmen--they didn't think they would ever have to go over there. We called them the "weekend warriors" whenever we were playing around. They didn't think they would go over there and get shot at but a lot of them have. Of course, that's what they got paid for. They're giving them bonuses. Hell, they're giving them 10,000 and \$20,000 bonuses just to sign on! They didn't give me nothing!

MARK JUNGE: You signed up on your own volition.

BOB LAYBOURN: A damned idiot!

MARK JUNGE: What did your parents think when you signed up?

BOB LAYBOURN: I guess they thought it was patriotic. They never fought it. I was working at Woolworth's. I think I made \$40 a week or something like that. I was a stock clerk. Stuff came in. You opened it up and took it upstairs. I was a grunt at Woolworth's and I was a grunt in the military.

MARK JUNGE: Were you always a grunt?

Laybourn: Always a grunt.

MARK JUNGE: That's why you wanted to own your own business finally. So, you have worked 63 years of this. When you going to retire?

BOB LAYBOURN: Why should I? If I come home, she leaves. No way. (Laughs). I love her. She's wonderful! I tell you, I'm a lucky fellow. Lucky to be here. Lucky to be alive. Lucky to ride my bike. Lucky to go float the river. Lucky to go skiing.

MARK JUNGE: You are amazing Bob. I've never met anybody like you.

BOB LAYBOURN: I know.

MARK JUNGE: How did you get so attached to the outdoors?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, it didn't happen at first. I'll admit that. But I came home and had never been hunting. Her dad went hunting. I went with her dad a couple times and then I got my dad to go hunting. Then my boys--Peter and Bob-- came along and we went out. We never had a tent or anything. We put a little canvas on the ground and wake up in the morning with snow on our faces. We didn't have a tent or a car or anything. Oh, those were the days!

MARK JUNGE: Are you going to continue to go up into the mountains and bike and kayak?

BOB LAYBOURN: Why not?

MARK JUNGE: But aren't you...you messed up your shoulder and your hips. Your whole body has been wracked.

BOB LAYBOURN: I need new shoulders. I think they would do good job but the worst thing is the anesthesia. They told me, "I don't think you'll survive another anesthesia." They don't want you to move so they knock you out dead. I've got 10 screws in my neck and 10 screws in my back. The doctor said I could survive the surgery but not the anesthesia.

MARK JUNGE: If you could do anything else in your life what would you do?

BOB LAYBOURN: I want to stay and take care of Margaret. That's my goal -- while she's working to take care of me. You see, people are going a lot longer now. My dad was 54 years old. Hell, I'm already 84--30 years older than him!

MARK JUNG: Well, but don't you credit some of that to your own strong will?

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, he committed suicide.

MARK JUNG: Your dad did?

BOB LAYBOURN: Yes. He was very insecure in this drinking thing... his drinking bouts. So we had built him a shop and a house. He had a good business in insulation. You get out of balance with booze, you know. He lit up his lawnmower and lay down beside it in the garage. It was carbon monoxide. They found him there. He lived out east and we lived downtown. They tried to save him but he had no response so they just let him die.

MARK JUNG: That's how my mother killed herself.

BOB LAYBOURN: Is that right? A lawnmower?

MARK JUNG: No. Carbon monoxide. She stuffed rags up the tailpipe or the garage door crack, I don't know. She was 54. Going back to your World War II experience--would you do it all over again?

BOB LAYBOURN: No way. They tried to get me to take work out at the base. I said, "The military is never going to make me stand in line or tell me what to do. I'm not having any work for them. Nothing."

MARK JUNG: So you don't consider that experience valuable for you?

BOB LAYBOURN: I never was sure I was going to come home. Those poor guys--there a lot of those farm guys--it wasn't the 60-year-olds over there fighting. It was all kids. We were all kids. You couldn't sell it to a family man first of all because they cost more. The lieutenant was probably two years older than what I was. We were all kids. He'd never been anywhere done anything. The Col. wasn't long in. That's how they fight these wars--with kids. That's what they're doing over there now. They're blowing up these Humvees with kids. They're blowing their legs off. You know we only hurry about their deaths. The amputees--there's thousands of them.

MARK JUNG: It goes without saying then that you didn't want to rise up in the military at all.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, I never even had a thought of it. All I wanted to do was get the hell out of there!

MARK JUNG: Did you discourage your boys in the military?

BOB LAYBOURN: Oh, who wants to raise their kids to be cannon fodder? If you're grunt and you have a number you have no more value to them than 5000 over here are 5000 over there.

MARK JUNG: I wasn't eligible to go.

BOB LAYBOURN: Well, you're lucky.

MARK JUNGE: Well, that's what I'm talking to you right now. Because you are very lucky.

BOB LAYBOURN: It's going to cost you hundred dollars.

MARK JUNGE: I can get the rest of the story from Margaret tomorrow. I'm going to get the rest of the story from your wife.

BOB LAYBOURN: She will tell you a different story.

¹OshKosh B'Gosh is an American children's apparel company founded in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1895. It is a subsidiary of Carter's. Originally a small-town manufacturer of adult work clothing, it has become best known for its children's clothing, especially bib overalls. The original children's overalls, dating from the early twentieth century, were intended to let parents dress their children like their fathers. According to the company, sales of the product increased after Miles Kimball, an Oshkosh-based mail-order catalog, featured a pair of the overalls in its national catalog in 1960. As a result, OshKosh began to sell their products through department stores and expanded their children's line. Children's clothing made up 15 percent of the company's sales in 1979; by 1993 that number was 95 percent. Oshkosh B'Gosh clothes are no longer made in Oshkosh. Downsizing of domestic operations and a massive increase in outsourcing and manufacturing at Mexican and Honduran subsidiaries saw the domestic manufacturing share drop below 10% by the year 2000.[2] The company was sold to Carter's, another clothing manufacturer in 2005 for \$312 million,[3] though it still operates under the original name and maintains a corporate headquarters in Oshkosh. Today, the company sells accessories, jeans, pants, shirts, sweaters, t-shirts and tank tops, and its trademark overalls. The company produces clothing for babies, infants, toddlers, kids (4-7), and youth (5-12). For a short time, OshKosh also made clothing for men and women, but stopped making adult sizes because of poor sales. The company also has over one hundred outlet stores in the United States of America.—Wikipedia.

²Bulbar polio (po-li-o-my-e-li-tis) --A highly infectious viral disease that chiefly affects children and, in its acute forms, causes inflammation of motor neurons of the spinal cord and brainstem, leading to paralysis, muscular atrophy, and often deformity. Through vaccination, the disease is preventable. Also called infantile paralysis.—the Free Dictionary, by Farlex.

³Landing Ship, Tank (LST) is the military designation for naval vessels created during World War II to support amphibious operations by carrying significant quantities of vehicles, cargo, and landing troops directly onto an unimproved shore. The first tank landing ships were built to British requirements by converting existing ships. This was followed by a purpose built ship. Thereafter, the British and US collaborated upon a joint design with the majority of the construction carried out by the US and supplied under lend-lease. The majority, a thousand, were laid down in the United States during World War II for use by the Allies. Eighty more were built in the United Kingdom and Canada.—Wikipedia.

⁴The Mitsubishi A6M Zero was a long-range fighter aircraft operated by the (Imperial Japanese Navy) from 1940 to 1945. The A6M was designated as the Mitsubishi Navy Type 0 Carrier Fighter (零式艦上戦闘機 rei-shiki-kanjō-sentōki?), and also designated as the Mitsubishi A6M Rei-sen and Mitsubishi Navy 12-shi Carrier Fighter. The A6M was usually referred to by the Allies as the "Zero", from 1940, the year in which the aircraft entered service with the Imperial Navy. The official Allied reporting name was "Zeke".--Wikipedia

When it was introduced early in World War II, the Zero was considered the most capable carrier-based fighter in the world, combining excellent maneuverability and very long range. In early combat operations, the Zero gained a legendary reputation as a dogfighter, achieving the outstanding kill ratio of 12 to 1, but by mid-1942 a combination of new tactics and the introduction of better equipment enabled the Allied pilots to engage the Zero on more equal terms. The IJNAS also frequently used the type as a land-based fighter. By 1943, inherent design weaknesses and the failure to develop more powerful aircraft engines meant that the Zero became less effective against newer enemy fighters that possessed greater firepower, armor, and speed, and approached the Zero's maneuverability. Although the Mitsubishi A6M was outdated by 1944, it was never totally supplanted by the newer Japanese aircraft types. During the final years of the War in the Pacific, the Zero was used in kamikaze operations. In the course of the war, more Zeros were built than any other Japanese aircraft.--Wikipedia

⁵USS General E. T. Collins (AP-147) was a General G. O. Squier-class transport ship for the U.S. Navy in World War II. She was named in honor of U.S. Army general Edgar Thomas Collins. She was transferred to the U.S. Army as USAT General E. T. Collins in 1946. On 1 March 1950 she was transferred to the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) as USNS General E. T. Collins (T-AP-147). She was later sold for commercial operation under the name SS New Orleans before being eventually scrapped.--Wikipedia

⁶James Albert Michener –(February 3, 1907 – October 16, 1997) was an American author of more than 40 titles, the majority of which were sweeping family sagas, covering the lives of many generations in particular geographic locales and incorporating historical facts into the stories. Michener was known for the meticulous research behind his work. Michener's major books include Tales of the South Pacific (for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1948), Hawaii, The Drifters, Centennial, The Source, The Fires of Spring, Chesapeake, Caribbean, Caravans, Alaska, Texas, and Poland. His nonfiction works include the 1968 Iberia about his travels in Spain and Portugal, his 1992 memoir The World Is My Home, and Sports in America. Return to Paradise combines fictional short stories with Michener's factual descriptions of the Pacific areas where they take place.--Wikipedia

⁷In the military, D-Day is the day on which a combat attack or operation is to be initiated. The best known D-Day is June 6, 1944 — the day of the Normandy landings — initiating the Western Allied effort to liberate mainland Europe from Nazi occupation during World War II. However, many other invasions and operations had a designated D-Day, both before and after that operation.--Wikipedia

⁸USS Wyoming (SSBN-742) is a United States Navy Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine which has been in commission since 1996. She is the fourth U.S. Navy ship to be named USS Wyoming, although it was only the third named after the state of Wyoming.--Wikipedia

⁹The Mitsubishi G4M (or "Type 1 land-based attack aircraft") was the main twin-engine, land-based bomber used by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service in World War II. The Allies gave the G4M the reporting name Betty. Japanese Navy pilots called it "葉巻" Hamaki (Cigar), due to its cylindrical shape. The G4M had very good performance, especially range, which was achieved by its structural lightness and an almost total lack of protection for its crew, with no armor plating or self-sealing fuel tanks. These omissions proved to be its weakness when confronted with American fighter aircraft during the Pacific War.—Wikipedia

¹⁰Hirohito, posthumously referred to as Emperor Shōwa in Japan (April 29, 1901 – January 7, 1989), was the 124th Emperor of Japan according to the traditional order, reigning from December 25, 1926, until his death in 1989. Although better known outside of Japan by his personal name Hirohito, in Japan he is now referred to primarily by his posthumous name Emperor Shōwa. The word Shōwa is the name of the era that corresponded with the

Emperor's reign, and was made the Emperor's own name upon his death. The name 裕仁 means "abundant benevolence".—Wikipedia

¹¹*General of the Army Douglas MacArthur (26 January 1880 – 5 April 1964) was an American general and field marshal of the Philippine Army who was Chief of Staff of the United States Army during the 1930s and played a prominent role in the Pacific theater during World War II. He received the Medal of Honor for his service in the Philippines Campaign, which made him and his father Arthur MacArthur, Jr., the first father and son to be awarded the medal. He was one of only five men ever to rise to the rank of General of the Army in the U.S. Army, and the only man ever to become a field marshal in the Philippine Army.—Wikipedia*

¹²*Big Boy -Even in retirement, Old Number 4004 remains an imposing sight. The world's largest steam locomotive, this powerful coal-fired engine was designed to pull a 3600-ton train over steep grades between Cheyenne, WY and Ogden, Utah. The 4004 is one of the eight remaining Big Boys on display throughout the country. On display year-round in Holliday Park in Cheyenne, Wyoming.—Cheyenne "Live the Legend"*

¹³*APC (medication): Aspirin, phenacetin, and caffeine (a pill containing all three). Phenacetin was the first nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) to be associated with kidney failure. – Medicine Net.com*